

WHAT ARE NATURAL AREAS?

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Natural Areas are protected public lands, set aside with the main objective of maintaining their natural features. Their management emphasizes public appreciation, education, research, and/or recreation when this is compatible with the main objective. Natural Areas are divided into three categories: Education, Recreation and Conservation, but in many cases a site may fit into more than one of these.

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF NATURAL AREAS?

Lands were first reserved for Natural Areas in 1963. Then as a Canadian centennial project in 1967 nearly 150 nominations for Natural Areas were made by academic, government, and public sources. In 1971, the first Natural Areas were set aside by the legislature under the Public Lands Act and in 1981, legislation for Natural Areas was incorporated in the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, and Natural Areas Act.

HOW ARE NATURAL AREAS SELECTED?

Sites are selected using these criteria: special biophysical features and diversity, public interest, minimal existing disturbances and dispositions, accessibility, proximity to user groups, user requirements, and local availability of other sites. Because management goals vary with different Natural Areas, there are special exceptions. For example, for a Conservation Natural Area protecting a unique geological feature or rare plant, neither accessibility nor proximity to user groups would be factors in selection.

WHERE ARE NATURAL AREAS?

Natural Areas are located throughout Alberta, but Recreation, and especially Education Natural Areas are concentrated within the settled portions of the province. Most are within 80 km of Edmonton, Red Deer or Calgary.


WHO USES NATURAL AREAS?

Natural Areas are selected primarily for local use, but also for scientific research and for meeting Alberta's conservation objectives with regards to protection of habitats and rare or special biophysical resources. The uses allowed on each Natural Area vary and are designed to meet the needs of the public and to ensure the long-term protection of the site. In general, casual recreationists such as cross country skiers, snowshoers, hikers, hunters, fishermen, berry-pickers, bird watchers, photographers, horseback riders and nature observers are encouraged to use Natural Areas -- with care. Schools and organized groups using Natural Areas for outdoor education, recreation or training exercises are also welcome. Several interested public groups have already incorporated as societies in order to acquire a recreational lease or license-of-occupation for the specific use of a designated Natural Area.

WHY ARE NATURAL AREAS IMPORTANT?

The rapidly accelerating pace of development makes it imperative to protect and preserve public lands with scenic value, natural habitat recreation value unique characteristics, or diverse biophysical habitats. This will ensure the continued availability of these areas for present and for future generations of Albertans.

For further information, please contact staff of the Natural Areas Program at 427-5209, 4th Floor, 9915 - 108 Street, Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2C9.



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GET INVOLVED: SPONSOR A NATURAL AREA

Alberta has about 100 legislated Natural Areas. These special parcels of public land conserve our natural heritage for public use. You can get actively involved in protecting these special places by sponsoring a Natural Area. The following are some ways in which you can participate:

1. Become a Volunteer Steward of a Natural Area. This will involve assisting the government in patrolling, inspecting and reporting on the condition of your Natural Area or may involve collecting information on the site's plants and animals;
2. Join a conservation or recreation organization and look into acquiring a long-term lease or license on a Natural Area;
3. Form a management advisory committee with other users of a Natural Area;
4. Look into entering into a management contract for a Natural Area;
5. Be a financial contributor to a specific Natural Area project. This could involve development of a parking lot or interpretive and hiking trails; installation of fencing or privies or picnic tables; or contributing to a general Volunteer Stewardship Program to pay for a newsletter and meetings, for example.

If sponsoring a Natural Area is of interest to you, please contact:

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